

Fragment of the Month: February 2019

The *Latin Iliad* in the Cairo Genizah (T-S Misc. 27.2 c-e)

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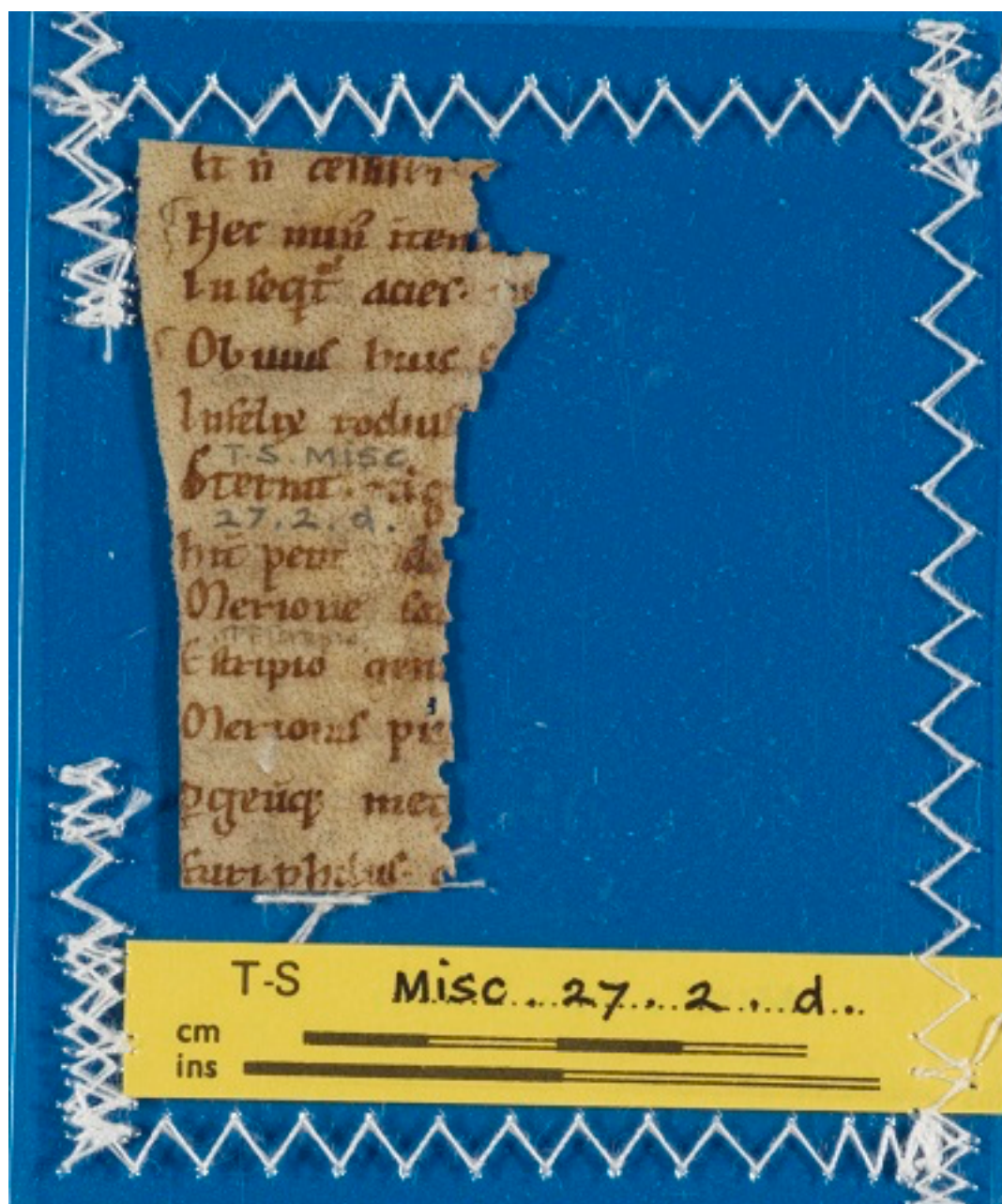
The Cairo Genizah never ceases to surprise its devotees. Among its many fragments, the vast majority are written in Judaeo-Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, all of which were widely known and used by the Jews of Cairo and their brethren in the Islamic world from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. But there are also fragments in other languages, whose presence in the storeroom of a medieval synagogue is more puzzling. During my own efforts to systematically survey all Genizah fragments in the world in search of texts pertaining to magic, astrology, divination and alchemy, I ran into some eighty-five fragments written in Latin characters. Some of these I could identify as Spanish, others are written in Italian, but some of the fragments seemed to be written in medieval Latin scripts that I could not decipher. The breakthrough came last year, when I participated in a conference on the Qubbat al-Khazna, the “Genizah” of the Great Mosque in Damascus, which contained mostly Quranic manuscripts but also some fragments of Christian and Jewish texts. In that conference, several scholars discussed the Latin fragments found in the Damascus Genizah, and dating to the Crusader period, and it was then that I realized that some of the Latin fragments from the Cairo Genizah might belong in the same historical context. I then asked one of the participants, Dr. Serena Ammirati, to look at the Latin-script fragments from Cairo and see whether she could decipher their contents. She can already point to one successful identification, and quite an unexpected find, described by her as follows -

T-S Misc. 27.2c-e are three small scraps of parchment, written on both sides, bearing the same Latin script, and stemming from a single manuscript. The script is a Caroline minuscule, probably originating in North-East France in the eleventh or twelfth century.

All three fragments contain verses from a poem known as *Ilias Latina*, originally composed by Baebius Italicus in the age of Nero, in the mid-first century CE. This text, which is a Latin abbreviation (in ca. 1000 verses) of Homer’s *Iliad*, was extremely popular in the Middle Ages, especially in school.[1] Our fragments stem from the section that covers the fifth book of the *Iliad*, in which are

recounted the great battles that took place between the Trojan and the Greek heroes before the walls of Troy, including the famous scene where Diomedes wounds the goddess Aphrodite, who hurries back to Mount Olympus to cry to her mother, Dione. Fragments 2d and 2e belong to the same original leaf: on the hair side, they preserve the beginnings and endings of lines 423-424; on flesh side, of lines 442-444. Fragment 2c has the endings of lines 461-475 on the hair side, and the beginnings of lines 482-495 on the flesh side.

The text may be reconstructed as follows (the translation is by George Kennedy, [2] and the slight inconsistencies between text and translation are due to the variant readings in our manuscript, which I shall discuss in detail in a forthcoming publication) -



T-S Misc.27.2.d (recto)

Fragments 2d + 2e (recto) hair side

vv. 423-434

423. Et ni(si) cessiss(et) [dextra
cecidisset eadem]

424. Nec min(us) i(n) Teucri[os
armis furit alter Atrides]

425. Inseq(ui)t(ur) acies· (et)
f[erro funera miscet.]

426. Obuius huic f[atis occurrit
ductus iniquis]

427. Infelix rodus, [quem uastae
cuspidis ictu]

428. Sternit (et) i(n)g[enti scapulas
transuerberat hasta]

429. Hi(n)c petit Ido[meneus
aduersa parte ruentem]

430. Merione fat[um; cuius post
funera laetus]

431. Estripio geni[tum Stygias
demittit ad umbras]

432. Merionis Pue[rum librata
percutit hasta]

433. P(re)geu(m)que Meg[es; tum
uastis horridus armis]

434. Euryphilus g[ladio metuentem
Hypsenora fun]dit

... and, had he not withdrawn, he would
have fallen by that very hand.

With no less fury does Atreus' second son
attack the Teucri,

while others follow and scatter death by
sword.

Against him, led by adverse fate, unlucky
Odus comes.

whom he had laid low with a blow of his
enormous lance

that cleft his shoulders with its mighty
shaft.

Then Idomeneus seeks Phaestus the
Maionian,

rushing from the other side, and exulting
at his death

sends the son of Strophius as well down to
the Stygian shades.

Meriones cuts Phereclum down with
brandished spear

and Meges kills Pedaeus. Then, bristling
with enormous arms,

Eurypylus lays Hypsenor low with sword as
he advanced ...



T-S Misc.27.2.e (recto)

Fragments 2e + 2d (verso) flesh side

vv. 442-454

442. [In medias que acies animosi]
more leo(nis)

443. Fert(ur) et [Astynoum magnum
quoque Hypir]ona fundit:

444. Com(m)inus hunc gladio, iaculo
feri]t emin(us) illu(m).

445. In(de) p(re)mit [Polyidon
Abantaque cuspi] de forti

446. Et notu(m) [bello Xanthum
uastumque Thoon]e.

447. Post ho[s infestus Chromiumque
et Echemmona] telo·

448. P(ro)[tu]r[bat celeri pariterque ad
Tartara m]ittit

449. Tū q[uoque Tydidae prostratus,
Pandare, d]extra

450. Occidi[s [infelix, accepto uulnere
tris]ti,

451. Dext[era qua naris fronti
coniungit]urime.

452. Dissipa[t et cerebrum galeae cum
parte] reuulsu(m)

453. Ossa . . [confossa spargit
Tydideus en]sis.

454. Iā(m) [que manum Aeneas simul
et Calydonius heros]

... and take himself into the midst of
fighting

like a raging lion, he cuts down
Astynous and great Hypiron too,

the one nearby with sword, the other
from afar with javelin.

Next he presses Polyidon and Abas
with a strong spear

and Xanthus, great in war, and mighty
Thoon.

After them in enmity he troubles
Chromius and Echemmon

with his swift spear and sends them
down to Tartarus as well.

You too, Pandarus, laid low by the
hand of Tydeus' son,

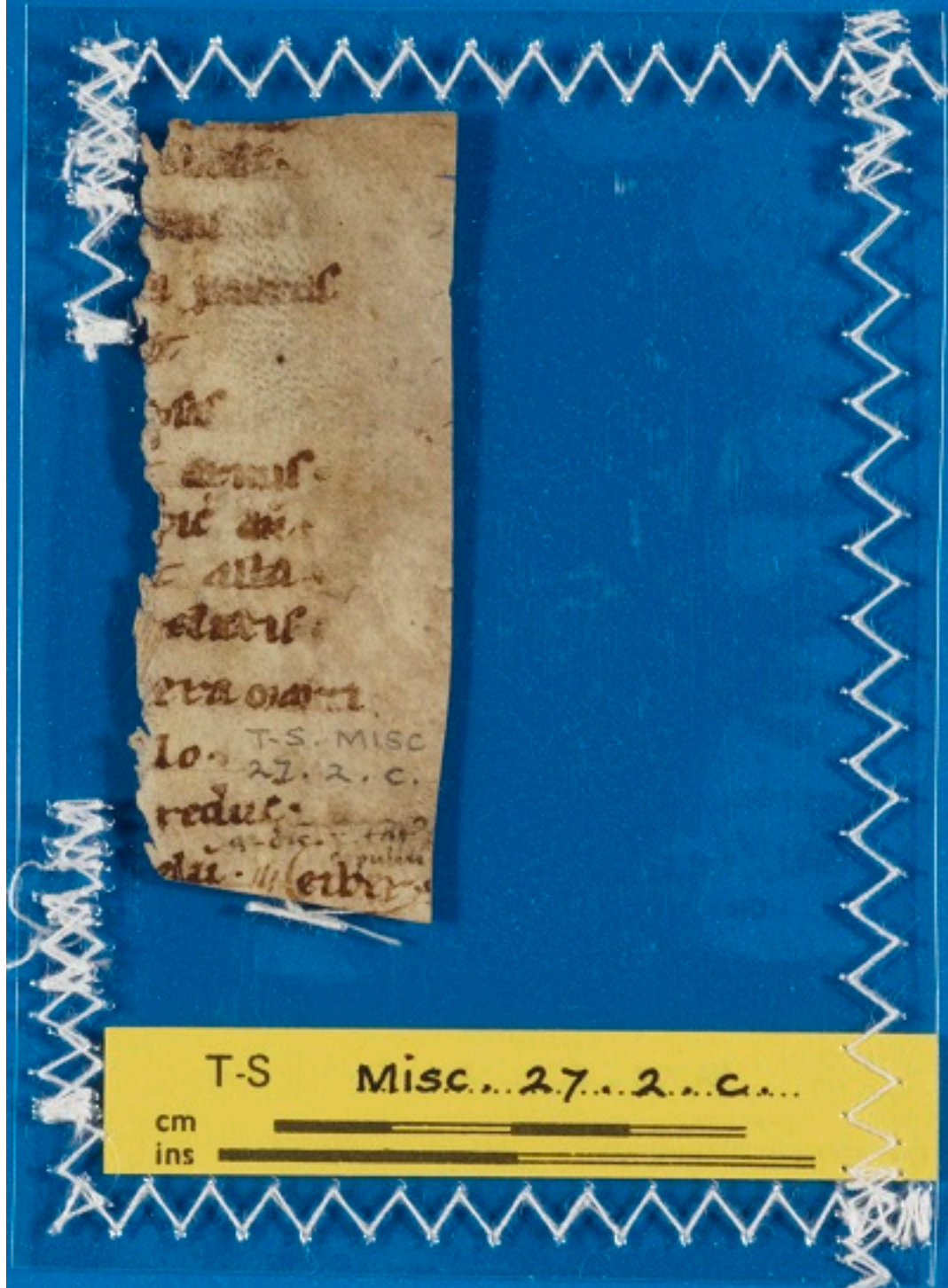
die miserably from a painful wound
where the nose's

right side is joined to the bottom of the
brow.

His brains seep out, torn with
fragments of his helm,

and Tyrides' sword scatters his broken
bones.

And now Aeneas and the Calydonian
hero had come near, ...



T-S Misc.27.2.c (recto)

Fragment 2c (recto) flesh side

vv. 461-475

461. [Bis seni quod uix iuuenes
tellure m]ouerent

462. [Sustulit et magno conamine
misi]t i(n) hoste(m).

463. [Ille ruit prostratus humi cum
fortibus ar]mis

464. [Quem Uenus aethereas
genetrix delap]sa p(er) auras

465. [Excipit et nigra corpus caligine
condi]t·

466. [Non tulit Oenides animis
nebulas que per] ipsas

467. [Fertur et in Uenerem
flagrantibus irrui]t armis

468. [Et neque quem demens ferro
petat ins]pic(it) an(te)

469. [Caelestemque manum mortali
uulnera]t asta.

470. [Icta petit caelum terris
Cytherea]relictis

471. [Atque ibi sidereae queritur
sua uuln]era marti.

472. [Dardanium Aenean seruat
Troianus Apol]lo·

473. [Accendit que animos iterum
que ad bella] reduc(it).

474. [Undique consurgunt acies et
puluere ca]elu(m)

475. [Conditur horrendis que sonat
clamoribus]ether

... one that twice six youth could scarce
have moved from out the earth,

and with great effort hurled it at his foe.

Aeneas in his strong armor fell full length
upon the ground

but Venus Genetrix slipped down along th'
etherial breezes,

and took him up and hid his body in black
mist.

This the mind of Diomede tolerated not and
through the very clouds

he goes and runs at Venus, his weapons
blazing,

and in madness, seeing no other object for
his weapon on the field,

he wounds her celestial hand with his
mortal spear.

Struck, the Cytherean rises from the earth
and seeks the sky

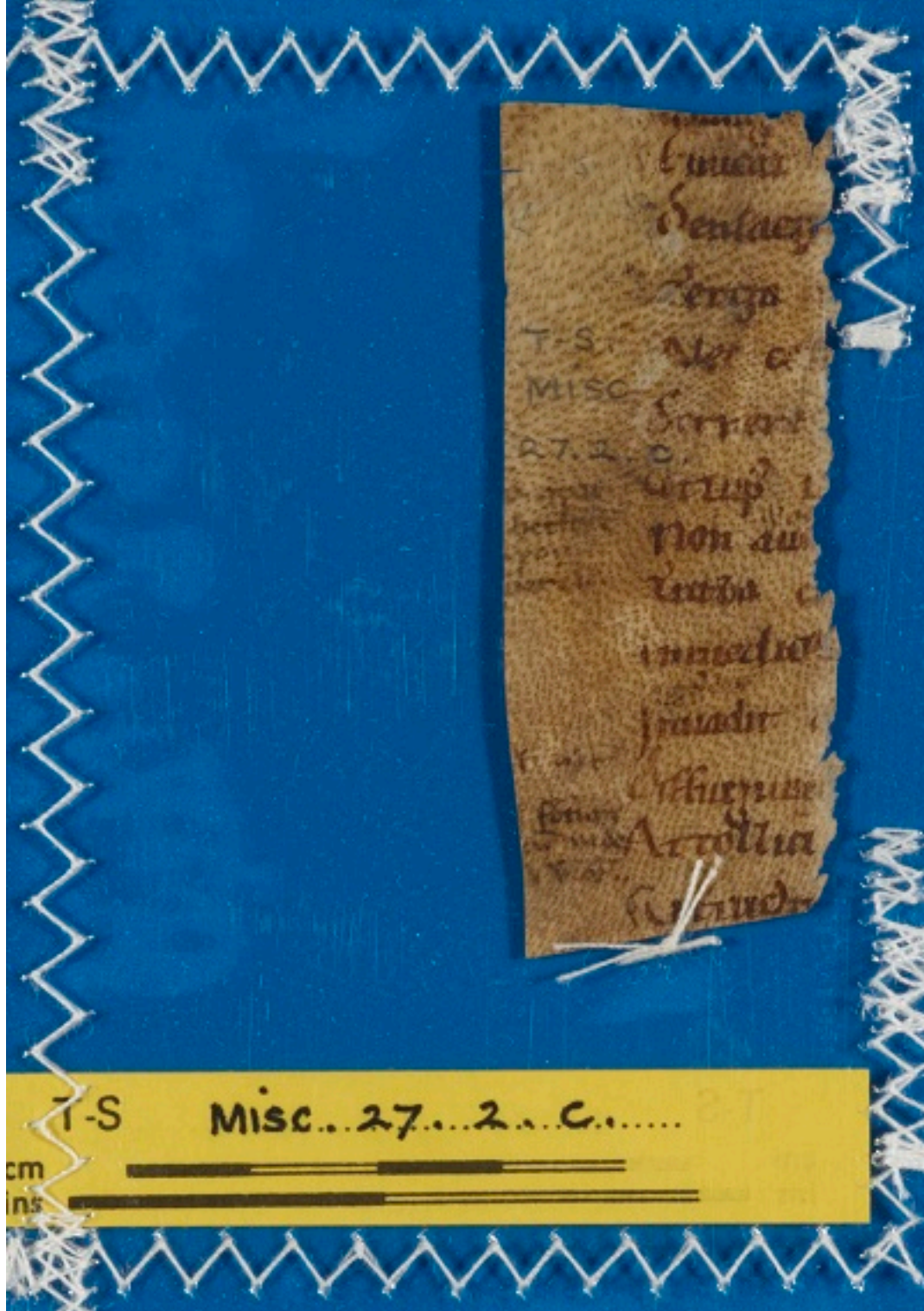
where she bemoans the wound to her
starry mother.

Trojan Apollo is the one who saves
Dardanian Aeneas,

inflames his spirits, and brings him back
again to war.

The battle lines heave on all sides and the
sky grows dark

with dust and the ether resounds with
outcries. ...



T-S Misc.27.2.c (verso)

Fragment 2c (verso) hair side

vv. 482-495

482. Şaṅg[uine manat humus,
campi sudore madescent]

483. Emicat [interea Ueneris
pulcherrima proles]

484. Densaq(ue) [Graiorum premit
agmina nudaque late]

485. Terga m[etit gladio funestaque
proelia miscet]

486. Nec cess[at spes una Phrygum
fortissimus Hector]

487. Sernere [caede uiros atque
agmina uertere Graium]

488. Ut lup(us) i(n) [campis
pecudes cum uidit apertis,]

489. Non auc[tor gregis ipse
comes, non horrida terret]

490. Turba c[un]cti; fremit esuriens
et negligit omnes]

491. In medios[que greges auidus
ruit: haut secus Hector]

492. Inuadit D[anaos et territat
ense cruento]

493. Diffugiunt [Graiorum acies,
Phryges acrius instant]

494. Attollun[tque animos: geminat
uictoria uires]

495. Ut uidit [socios infesto cedere
Marte]

... The ground is steeped with blood, the
plains are wet with sweat.

Meanwhile, Venus' handsome son shines
forth

and presses back the dense ranks of the
Greeks and mows down

their bare backs with sword and scatters
deadly battle.

The one hope of the Phrygians, Hector,
bravest of them all,

ceases not to lay men low in death and
turn the ranks of Greeks.

As when a wolf sees flocks in open fields,

fears nor herder nor the crowd of fierce
dogs with him,

but rages in his hunger and ignores all else
and runs

eagerly into the middle of the herd, so
Hector

invades the Danaï and frightens them with
his bloody sword.

The Greek lines weaken; the Phrygians
push on more keenly

and raise their spirits. Victory doubles
strength.

When he sees his comrades yielding in the
deadly battle ...

How did these fragments of a Crusader-period copy of a first century CE Latin reworking of a Greek poem of the eighth or seventh century BCE end up in the Cairo Genizah? Given the shape of these three fragments, it seems likely that they were cut from their original leaves and reused somewhere else, possibly to strengthen the bindings of other books. The re-use of old manuscripts - especially those made of parchment - in the binding of new ones is well-known to scholars working on the Cairo Genizah, and even more so to those who work on the so-called "European Genizah." But who used these Latin fragments to bind his book, and how did they end up in the Cairo Genizah? In this context it is interesting to note that the two other fragments in T-S Misc. 27.2, fragments a and b, are large parchment folios, containing *piyyutim* by R. Pinhas ha-Cohen.[3] Both fragments are written on one side only, and bear the marks of having been pressed on their margins. Did they come from the same book-binding as the Latin fragments? At this stage, this is not really clear. But as we noted at the

outset, there are more Latin fragments in the Cairo Genizah, and they may provide more clues to this riddle, and many more unexpected surprises surely await in store.

Footnotes

[1] For a detailed analysis and a critical edition, see M. Scaffai, *Baebii Italici Ilias Latina: Introduzione, edizione critica, traduzione italiana e commento*, Bologna, 1982, 2nd ed., 1996.

[2] G.A. Kennedy, *The Latin Iliad: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Notes*, Fort Collins 1998, pp. 56-57.

[3] For their text, see the edition by S. Elitzur, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Pinhas ha-Kohen*, Jerusalem, 2004, who uses these two fragments in her edition, but only describes them (p. 448) as written in “a typical Ashkenazi handwriting.”

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